



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 112

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "**STRENGTH-BASED**" ORGANIZATION (PART 6)

What is the revolutionary insight shared by all great managers?

An old parable will serve to introduce the insight they shared.

There once lived a scorpion and a frog.

The scorpion wanted to cross the pond, but, being a scorpion, he couldn't swim. So he scuttled up to the frog and asked:

"Please, Mr. Frog, can you carry me across the pond on your back?"

"I would," replied the frog, "But, under the circumstances, I must refuse. You might sting me as I swim across."

"But, why would I do that?" asked the scorpion, "It is not in my interests to sting you, because you will die and then I will drown."

Although the frog knew how lethal scorpions were, the logic proved quite persuasive. Perhaps, felt the frog, in this one instance the scorpion would keep his tail in check. And so the frog agreed. The scorpion climbed onto his back, and together they set off across the pond. Just as they reached the middle of the pond, the scorpion twitched his tail and stung the frog. Mortally wounded, the frog cried out:

"Why did you sting me? It is not in your interests to sting me, because now I will die and you will drown."

"I know," replied the scorpion, as he sank into the pond. "But I am a scorpion. I have to sting you. It's in my nature."

Conventional Wisdom encourages you to think like the frog. People's natures do change, it whispers. Anyone can be anything they want to be if they just try hard enough. Indeed, as a manager, it is your duty to direct those changes. Devise rules and policies to control your employees' unruly inclinations. Teach them skills and competencies to fill in the traits they lack. All of your best efforts as a manager

should focus on either muzzling or correcting what nature saw fit to provide.

Great managers reject this out of hand. They remember what the frog forgot: that each individual, like the scorpion, is true to his unique nature. They recognize that each person is motivated differently, that each person has his own way of thinking, and his own style of relating to others. They know that there is a limit to how much remolding they can do to someone. But they don't bemoan these differences and try to grind them down. Instead, they capitalize on them. They try to help each person become more and more of who he already is.

Simply put, this is the one insight echoed by tens of thousands of great managers:

People don't change that much.

Don't waste time trying to put in what was left out.

Try to draw out what was left in.

That is hard enough.

This insight is the source of their wisdom. It explains everything they do with and for their people. It is the foundation for their success as managers.

This insight is revolutionary. It explains why great managers do not believe that everyone has unlimited potential; why they do not help people fix their weaknesses; why they insist on breaking the "Golden Rule" with every single employee; and why they play favorites. **It explains why great managers break all the rules of Conventional Wisdom.**

Simple though it may sound, this is a complex and subtle insight. Applied without sophistication, you can quickly find yourself suggesting that managers should ignore people's weaknesses and that all training is a complete waste of time. Neither is true. Like all revolutionary messages, their insight requires explanation: How do great managers apply it? What does it ask of employees? What does it mean for organizations? What might it mean for the Coast Guard?

Next: Focus on what the world's greatest managers do differently.

Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: "First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently"

For more information about the research and book 'First Break All the Rules' please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>

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